

## **Humanizing Assessment in the USA: Learning Stories, Relationship Driven Work in Data a Driven World**

Educators in the United States of America (USA) are drowning in meaningless, time consuming child assessments practices. Teachers are yearning for change and seeking a more authentic assessment approach to make children's learning visible. A collaborative effort to transform California early childhood assessment practices, using Learning Stories, has initiated a new paradigm shift for California teachers and early education programs.

In the USA, early childhood educators are facing a data driven world where teachers must integrate standardized assessment requirements. Many States, including California, are participating in a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) which provide financial incentives to increase quality ratings to early and school-age care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards. By participating in QRIS, early education and school-age teachers are assessing children's developmental outcomes using standardized assessment tools. These assessment methods have resulted in restricting teachers and causing focus attention on developmental levels rather than learning experiences. These standardized tools have also resulted in a lack of teachers' joy in observing children and excludes the child, family and community participation and voices. Change has begun, as teachers and administrators have started to push back to policy makers and compliance monitors, and vocalized a need for change in current assessment practices. Many California Community Colleges, Universities, and child care education programs have embraced Learning Stories as a formative assessment approach that uses narrative stories to document the power of relationships, supports child learner identities, and a deeper connection with families.

Grounded in an image of the child as competent and motivated agent in their own learning, Learning Stories helps California teachers and parents to look beyond basic skills and abilities to dispositions and approaches to learning. Many educators in California have found the value of family voice as integral to this process as teachers engage with families to understand their unique perspective; the Learning Stories serves both as a guide and tangible artifact documenting the child's learning experiences through teacher analysis and reflection. Learning from one another, families and teachers deepen their understanding of the child, and identify possibilities to support growth in multiple contexts.

Learning Stories facilitates reflective practice in 'learning community' models promoting sensitive curriculum planning attuned to the children's strengths and interest with family context woven into the process. In a data driven world, California teachers have found Learning Stories provides a simple, profound tool that allows assessment, documentation and responsive, relationship based practices to coexist and thrive. Learning Stories is being embraced as a vehicle to promote values and best practices. USA historical context and assessment practices, research findings, and examples of application of Learning Stories will be presented.